2/14/96 Indy

Politics | by Cara DeGette

Gender, Marriage and the Presidency

GOP candidates rally against gay marriages

HOPING TO INSPIRE ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL SENTIMENT into the Grand Old Party's horse race for the White House, Colorado for Family Values representatives and 2,000 other activists rallied in the midst of last weekend's Iowa caucus blitz to push a resolution condemning same-gender marriages.

Former CFV president Kevin Tebedo, one of the organizers of a national coalition formed to combat gays and lesbians seeking state-sanctioned marriage, said he hopes to bring the issue to the forefront of the 1996 presidential election.

"This is going to be the issue where Americans are going to get what they want, and the homosexuals will cry and whine, and they won't get what they want," Tebedo said. "The American public is saying enough is enough."

Others argue that agitators are using a Valentine's Day timing to politicize a spiritual and private union between two people who love each other and want to declare their lifelong bond.

Last weekend's "National Campaign to Protect Marriage" rally received little press coverage in the midst of massive campaigning, but in a pre-rally press release, CFV announced that all eight GOP presidential candidates had signed a so-called "Marriage Protection Resolution," offering their promise to the traditional man-woman union and forbidding state-sanctioned marriage to couples of the same gender.

Candidates Pat Buchanan, Phil Gramm and Alan Keyes showed up for the rally, which was sponsored by the Christian Coalition and emceed by actor Charlton Heston. On stage, Buchanan praised the traditional American family and reportedly hailed CFV Chairman Will Perkins as the "Hero of Colorado." In an interview last week, Buchanan's Deputy Press Secretary K.B. Forbes said protecting the nuclear family is a "top issue" with his candidate. The deterioration of the family, Forbes said, has resulted in the downfall of schools, local pride and even the American Dream.

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>
> ***— Pat Buchanan, GOP presidential Candidate***

Buchanan believes that while gays and lesbians deserve compassion, homosexuality is "wrong," and their "conduct cannot command respect." Same-gender marriages further threaten to decimate our society, his press secretary said.

"[Homosexuals] will try to push these proposals to pair themselves with each other as a married couple — which is unacceptable and un-American," he said. "It's not an issue of love, but an issue of sexual behavior."

Candidate Bob Dornan's camp agreed. Campaign manager Terri Cobban cited the "moral decay" that is threatening a "cultural breakdown" in faith, family and freedom in America.

"[Dornan] believes in the sanctity of marriage," Cobban said. "We have an absolute breakdown in the traditional marital structure, and that is what we need to turn back to."

Tebedo and other conservatives have embraced the same sex issue since the Hawaii Supreme Court recently ruled that denying gay couples marriage licenses is unconstitutional, unless the state can otherwise prove compelling evidence.

The state has not yet responded, but CFV and other groups across the country fear an onslaught of gay couples will fly to Hawaii, be married and then return to their home states and demand legal recognition. Legislation has been introduced in 17 states this year — including Colorado — that would invalidate same sex marriages and forbid the state from recognizing married couples of the same gender. Tebedo said the rash of legislation being introduced is "not coincidental."

Colorado's proposal, which is co-sponsored by five representatives from El Paso County, is scheduled for debate this week.

The legislation may be an unnecessary technicality, however, for monogamous lesbian and gay couples who have made lifelong commitments to each other before their minister, their friends and families, their God and their employers.

Hundreds of government and privatel owned businesses nationwide — including the Golden-based Coors Brewing Company, owned by the staunchly conservative Coors family — already extend employee benefits to same-gender and live-in partners. And, while sometimes controversial, denominational ministers and rabbis for years have blessed same gender unions.

In 1994, the Rev. James White of the First Congregational Church downtown joined in holy matrimony two Colorado Springs women who vowed to love, honor and serve each other until death parts them. Controversy continues to swirl about his decision to bless the women's union, but White recalls the celebration as "one of the most beautiful wedding ceremonies I've ever done."

"I think that where love exists, and people want to make a commitment of lifelong fidelity, we should say 'god bless you' for not wanting to live promiscuously in the world and for wanting to recognize before God their commitment to each other," he said.

In politics, the GOP candidates who pledged allegiance to the new Marriage Protection Resolution apparently disagree with that premise. But during the stakes-are-high 1996 presidential race, some are weighing whether the issue is truly critical.

Frank Whitworth of the local gay rights organization Ground Zero said he believes agitation against same-gender monogamous unions will only serve to alienate the general population.

"This is not a timely issue; it's really been thrust on us," he said. "I believe a large number of moderate Republicans are miffed at ultra-conservatives pushing this issue because it's so explosive in this presidential election year."

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